

The Chung Pyung Providence - Part One: So This is Korea

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Hyo Nam Kim -- Dae Mo Nim -- Hoon Mo Nim

I first went to Chung Pyung Lake, as it was known then, in 1996 for the forty-day workshop. Back in the day it was quite primitive with sleeping facilities and lecture halls in tents. They were nice tents. I had a 'great experience' as the saying goes. I always do well at workshops because I am always 'all in.'

There were plenty of Americans and Europeans at the 40 day and Michael Jenkins coordinated the westerners. We climbed the mountain every morning, read aloud in unison from Exposition of the Principle and of course the main activity

was the clapping/ansu sessions. My favorite thing was when I had a chance to beat the drum to keep time during the clapping/holy song sessions. I put all my effort and energy into all the activities without hesitation. It seems that it was a time just prior to the structured ancestor liberation based on a payment schedule. We were told to liberate our ancestors through clapping/ansu/holy song sessions. I guess we were just free lancing.

Testimonies and reporting of spiritual experiences was encouraged. It was the thing to do and I, like a lot of others, began actively seeking and cultivating spiritual experiences that could be testified to. I began to imagine that I could feel and then see and hear the young Americans who came to Korea during the 1950-1953 Korean war. They seemed to be saying to me "We came here and we wanted to go home. We never wanted to die here. Don't let us have died in vain". Of course I assured them that they had saved Korea and saved True Parent's life. They had not died in vain. Even now as I write this the tears are flowing. I cried and testified that I had liberated these forgotten souls. A legitimate spiritual experience or the product of group hysteria, to this day I am not sure. There were plenty of tearful testimonies during those 40 days.

Of course it was not all sunlight and birds singing. There was a lot of strange stuff going down. The night I arrived it was past ten o'clock and after registration I was sent off to find the 40 day workshop brother's tent. Now I have never been a refuge on the run escaping dire conditions. But I swear to God I know what it feels like. I got to the brother's tent exhausted and more than a little confused. Inside the tent I encountered a mass of snoring, moaning, coughing and farting male humanity. Every square inch of floor space was occupied. They were stretched out in what we called in the Marine Corps, snout to bristle and ass hole to belly button. It didn't matter I needed sleep. I chose a likely spot and wedged myself between two warm smelly bodies. The early morning piss calls required a mixture of delicate balance while tip-toeing through the bodies and a willingness to step on flesh when unavoidable. Good thing these were basically religious people or the temper flare ups would have surely turned to violence. In the morning the schedule began.

There was no dining hall per say at that time. All meals were set up and served outdoors in what could best be described as a picnic area. There were a limited number of tables but most people got their plate and stood up to eat. There was a vinyl tarp stretched overhead presumably to shield the diners from inclement weather. The first seven days of the workshop the weather was bright and clear and the meal time atmosphere was festive. On the eighth day the heavens opened and the monsoon rains poured down continuously. Without rhyme, reason or explanation the same day as the rains came, the overhead tarp was taken down. For the next ten days all stood in the pouring rain and bolted down waterlogged food. What did it mean? Nobody knew.

One day we woke up and the combination bath house and toilet was boarded up. Plywood was nailed over the door and windows. There was no way in. For the brothers it was a minor inconvenience and we stepped into the tree line to answer nature's call but for the sisters it was an emergency and I saw a lot of poor souls wandering around in great distress. The bath house never reopened and a couple of enterprising brothers pried the plywood off one of the windows and we were able to crawl into the dark and retrieve our toilet kits that we had stored there. Eventually they brought in a string of porta-potties for sanitation. Again no explanation was forthcoming.

On another day we woke up and as usual we started up the mountain for prayer. To our utter astonishment the trail was gone, just gone. Where I remembered the trail had been the day before, the trail had disappeared and in its place were newly planted trees. Of course nobody knew why.

The food was also a big problem for a lot of people. The food was basic Korean fare. Rice, kimchee, soup and a few side dishes is what is served in any Korean institutional setting. There was even a little fish or meat sometimes. For Koreans and I suppose for Japanese, who's every day staple is rice, it was fine. For westerners who are used to more variety it was sometimes unbearable. I know a couple of people who survived the forty days on only canned tuna fish bought in the store.

Likewise sleeping and sitting on the floor was painful for many westerners. I never saw a bed, chair or sofa while I was there. I later learned that Koreans LIKE to sit on the floor. They are more comfortable on the floor than on chairs. For most westerners, excluding yoga practitioners, it was a test of endurance.

I put up with all these things with an attitude of challenge. Hell I was an ex-marine and ex-MFT. I have slept in holes, under cars, eaten c- rations and lived off the land. There were other things that were more disturbing. We were told that our bodies were filled with, infected so to speak, with millions of tiny evil spirits. For me, at that time anyway, this was totally off the page. It was so outside of my own view of reality based on my experience in life that it didn't even merit a response and so I ignored it.

Another thing was angels. There was plenty of talk of angels and angelic assistance. Like any refugee camp or other large concentration of unwashed humanity, communicable diseases were rampant. Except in the most serious cases people were told it was caused by evil spirits and they should work harder and shake it off. People who wanted to go into town and see a doctor were told by Mrs. Richardson that it was not advisable because the angels who were protecting us could not go outside the front gates and we would lose their protection. It was so outrageous that I laughed. What was more outrageous is that people accepted it.

One day I noticed a crowd, mostly Japanese women, gathered at the base of one of the special trees and staring up in what can only be described as rapture. I joined them and also looked up into the branches of the tree. After a while I asked somebody I knew what it was all about. She said "look can't you see them?" "What?" I asked. "The Angeles in the tree". I looked and looked and looked and guess what? Not even one angel. Later a photo was circulated purporting to be millions of angels appearing as points of light in the tree. It dawned on me that what was going on here was a classic case of mass hysteria. It was not unlike what happens in many religious traditions and is more about the intense desire of believers than about actual phenomenon. Think Our Lady of Lourdes, statues that weep and paintings that bleed. In a way it was positively medieval.

On my return to the states I chose to forget the strange things and use the experience as a chance for revival. In my absence the providence at Chung Pyung grew exponentially.